



# *The Playground of the Gods*

*And Other Poems*



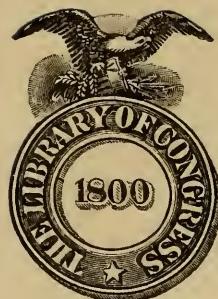
By ELIZABETH HUNTINGTON

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# **THE PLAYGROUND OF THE GODS**



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*And other Poems*

BY

ELIZABETH HUNTINGTON



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THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY  
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## FOREWORD

**T**O wish—and to try—to write poetry is to turn one's face toward a great and solemn mystery. He who has in him the mere ingredients of poetic appreciation feels that; and if he is stilled and sobered by the thought, how much greater is his awe, who would not only read in trembling expectation the poetry of others, but who would himself cast off his coil of handicap—whether it be circumstance, or sloth, or sheer embarrassment how to advance—and enter into that sublime and terrible contest wherein whoever would succeed must stake as his goal his consecrated self? The realization is sufficient to keep such an one nibbling his pencil stub and eyeing his quire of paper (for which, if he be a proper poet, he has probably paid the price of a supper) in a state of inexpressiveness while hope lasts. "Fortunate," sang Homer, "is he whomsoever the Muses love, and sweet flows his voice from his lips." True, but one who stands tremulous at the foot of Helicon, musing on the unknown beings who haunt the fertile slopes, the gushing fountains and the mellow marbles waiting eternally behind the mists and the dark and the implacable steepness, cannot be sure that he is so beloved.

## FOREWORD

But he has no doubt received from time to time—in the liquid rustle of poplars, or the pressure of a worshipped hand, or a lovely face seen once; in the perilous wild gold of autumn fields; through a friendship, a printed line, or the nameless stir in the blood on certain clear, blue mornings—that which he presumes to be a hint of favor. And so he takes breathless leave of his tangible existence—his work-a-day humors and obligations—and addresses himself to the ghostly and arduous ascent.

How far he will climb, whether or no he will at last turn back convinced that the shrouded splendor is not for him to help to reveal, is known only to those austere presences who, eternally silent and eternally aware, look down upon each effort from their everlasting heights.

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# THE PLAYGROUND OF THE GODS



## INVOCATION

Life-giving Spirit of Poetry, breathe on me!  
Teach my slow hand and indeterminate mind  
To dream and execute thy minstrelsy!  
Turn my dim thoughts to heights where they shall  
    find

Chill brooklets gurgling forth eternally  
To catch the eternal comfort of the sun—  
And poplars murmuring secrets vernally,  
And spring-starred moorlands where the deep  
    winds run.

O take my colorless breath, and make from it  
A sentence beautiful as sounds that flit  
Across the morning meadows on a day  
When April's vanished, and immortal May  
Wakes smiling on the hillsides, her sweet eyes  
Unfolding in unnumbered flowers, and cries  
Of stirring birds her countless voices, and  
Ungathered mist the pressure of her hand.

Great Spirit! Leafy Power! Thou Voice of fields  
And deepening woods! Thou Sense that green  
    earth yields!

Thou Soul of sun and waters! Come to me—  
And set the springtime of my music free!

## SEVERN'S DRAWING OF DYING KEATS

Turned from the shadows is the spare, rich face—  
Confusedly, the dank and tired head  
Rolls sideward, groping for a softer place;  
And morning freshly stirs the crumpled bed.

The mellow mouth, the long, decisive brows  
And harsh-afflicted throat, the draggled hair,  
The old, cruel transformations, droop and  
drowse—

And all that splendid speaking's silent there.

And last of all the sacramental line:  
“A deadly sweat was on him all this night.”  
O God! How his own moon once more does shine!  
How spring still blows herself from green to  
white!

## RECOGNITION

Not know you now? Dear God! When have I  
ceased  
My search for you? You've passed me frigid-  
fleeced  
In bitter winter sunsets, and you've grieved  
Through lingering leaves grown brittle and be-  
reaved.  
Hushed light on snow, the mute and marvellous  
mesh  
Of tangled flowers, prophesied your flesh,  
And dimly dawning bird calls rippling air  
Washed sweet in Heaven had your breath.—Your  
hair  
Was darkness falling. Some word of your head  
By every blue-brimmed flower has been said  
A score of Maytime mornings, and your eyes  
Have looked upon me from unnumbered skies.  
O, fragrant, fragile crimson have you blown  
In petals round me! Frosty-set, you've grown  
From every sparkling, singing star—and rest  
In inarticulate dusk foretold your breast.

## POETS' LITANY

From twilight in each darkening vein,  
From shaded, troubled blood,  
From pulse grown intricate with pain,  
From Autumn fire and flood  
Within the soul—  
O make us whole!  
Deliver us!

From the rich ache of words that flow  
Unwritten to our hearts,  
And ebb again—from sap and snow,  
From April's ferny darts  
Sprung from the fresh  
Mould of our flesh—  
O set us free!

## UNFULFILLED

O I shall die, some unremembered day,  
Not ever having made the world aware  
Of your lost loveliness—too late to say  
One perfect word about your perished hair.

Only a last dry swirl of autumn leaves,  
My heart once more caught to the lingering sun—  
A final quietude that grips and grieves,  
The singing silent, and the daylight done.

Into the lone adventure I shall go,  
The rhythms in my darkening brain yet strong—  
Dear Heart! Dear Love!—And you will never  
know  
God found me trying still to sing your song.

## PAOLO TO FRANCESCA

You ask me what's your beauty. In your eyes  
The rapt renewal of blue morning lies,  
And in and out of your most glorious hair  
Beat endless sunsets. The chaste autumn air  
Abides about your brows, and that soft-hued,  
Immaculate dream—that star-spun solitude  
That we call twilight—sleeps between your hands.  
When you but speak, far surf to desolate sands  
Creeps sighing, and some slow red death of day  
That happened long ago recurs; and gay  
Leaf shapes and shadows—they that used to  
dance  
Blithely to Pan's cleft footfalls—once more glance  
Across a meadow lying velvet-green  
In the soft arms of beauty that has been.  
Narcissus' waxen sweetness droops again  
Upon his envious pool—a fragile pain  
That melts in crystal—when you turn your head,  
And that old loveliness—now long time dead—  
The pallid-petaled, brief anemone  
That intrigued beauty-mad Persephone,  
Sways in your pulses. O the countless flowers  
That grow in all your looks! The murmurous  
hours  
Of fragrant, fervid fruits, rich-drooping after  
Engendering rains, that drowse behind your  
laughter!

## MELROSE—EVENING

The keen Scotch air and the strong Scotch hills,  
A sense of waterfalls—half heard  
In the darkening healthfulness—that fills  
Each thickening shade, while little Tweed spills,  
And the night receives the voice of a bird.

Black patches that are soon to merge  
Into a mauve, unquiet sea—  
The unknown voice and the unguessed urge  
Of twilight—and late winds that purge  
All but clear peace from the heart of me.

## LINES

Until I saw snow falling on your hair  
I did not know that beauty could be born  
So casually—from quiet midnight air  
And chill, untroubled moisture, and forlorn  
Mid-winter depths. O dearly loved! It came  
So softly down, without one agony—  
Except my slow breath stumbling on your name,  
And travail in the deep, deep heart of me.

"ECCE DEUS FORTIOR ME"

Slowly, and travailling with the infinite pangs  
Of beauty to be born, let me bring forth  
One word. All day I've agonized and roamed—  
Great with the intricate misery of song—  
Where flowers grew tearfully in gathering mist,  
And fresh-clipped, chilly hills rolled in between  
My heart and the watery distances; where all  
The loveliness was lovelier for my pain,  
And all the dews more subtle for my need—  
Because I, unprepared, had seen the face,  
To see which I'd been tortuously conceived  
And born, and wafted wonderingly along  
The beauteous, winding passages of growth—  
Dark, and a dim sweet power of petals blown;  
Dawn, and a gradual pulse of silver sound;  
Cold hollows dripping ripe and languid rains,  
And wind along lush meadows, and the moon  
A somber yellow over deep-drenched moors—  
Because I'd heard the voice of voices speak—  
Because—O Life! O Living! Two strange hands  
Had closed around my soul. —Because I loved.

## EXPECTANT

Out of the mellow, moonlit night  
A mystic vapor, cold and white;  
Up to the palpitating skies  
The night-time's thin and eerie cries;  
Over the fragile face of the trees  
The restless fingers of the breeze;  
Starting to meet you, as you come,  
The heart's quick throbbing, fierce and dumb.

## AFTER A LOSS

O God, take not these from me! Leave the sun  
Swooning in passion on a beauteous sea,  
Lush grasses where moist breezes still can run,  
And one rapt star—a silver threnody—  
Sounding in Heaven when the day is done.

Let woodbine still assuage the yearning night  
With sweetness, and wet violets yet suspire  
Their purple breaths; leave hyacinths still white,  
And poplars still a soft and shimmering choir  
Forever singing of a cool, cool light.

I am content, if only I can see  
Flowers still growing, and the deathless stars—  
Sense warm, unuttered showers, and still be  
Transfigured by the mute and fiery bars  
Of sunrise, and the long love of some tree.

## INARTICULATE

You are not mortal—you are summer's birth,  
September's smouldering sorrow, and the haze  
Engendering the world with greener days  
When mellow rains enrich the drowsy earth.

## THE SCHOLAR IN LOVE

This beauty that I'm reading, dear, is more  
Than sounding waves upon a sounding shore—  
And more than sacred groves of austere oak  
Where Grecian Jove in Grecian grandeur spoke,  
While pure-eyed skies grew dim, and sunny air  
Cooled in the sound, and blew a warning where  
The artless shepherd, on his hill's thick green  
Reclining—half his child's mind on the sheen  
Of snow-piled Chelmos, and the rest to keep  
The docile bleating of his wooly sheep  
Within his ear—puffs out his cheeks, and fills  
With reedy joy his willow pipe, and thrills  
The noontide musing of some creature, made—  
Apollo's whim!—from color, sun and shade,  
And ductile moss, and spongy beds of scent,  
And all this beauty that the god has lent—  
Half in derision—muffled up in coat  
Of shaggy hair, where gold tears—cowslips—  
    float,  
Caught on the uncouth bristles; cloven feet,  
And such a face as frightens all the sweet  
Lives growing in the wood, who can't believe  
The creature's gentle, too. So must he grieve  
The piney hours away in solitude,  
His unseen self as exquisitely hued  
As that that's seen is ugly. More than these—  
More than the dryads drowsing in the trees,  
And than Diana leaving her far sky  
To find Endymion's anguish out, and try

To soothe it on her bosom frosty-white  
Till fresh Aurora stoops her cheek to night,  
With all her rosy winds just up and blowing  
The damps of sleep from earth, and gladly flowing  
From stream to mountain and from hill to vale,  
And filling every slack and simple sail  
For early, nut-brown fishers—more than all  
That here is written's here—for your words fall  
Among the beauteous rhythms, and your face  
Turns toward me at the same time that some  
    grace

That must have been much like it fills with song  
A young Arcadian lover. You belong—  
You whom I love!—immortally among  
The hills where Hellas' soul was seen and sung—  
Your feet upon her grasses, and your heart  
Of all her lovely world the loveliest part.

TO —

“O, never a doubt but somewhere,” so you sang,  
Young flaming minstrel! We who are still here  
Can only wonder if the brave words rang  
About you in some billowy meadow, clear  
With spirit-sunlight, sweet with ghostly flowers,  
When your closed lids relaxed and you looked  
out—

Transfigured, new-compounded, (dead some  
hours!)

Musing on what the quiet was about.

Have they left you your gold, imperious hair?  
Unglorified, is your brow still your own?  
And is your sentient head still proudly thrown  
Back, as in dumb defence of too much joy,  
Back, as in fear of tasting in one breath  
All wisdom, all experience? Part sheer boy,  
The other part of you as old as death?

But you have missed—O, surely!—in those calm,  
Cold, sacramental winds, familiar flesh  
You cleaved to here on earth. You've yearned for  
balm  
Of some old, mad encounter—sweet, warm mesh  
Of slow-pulsating hair in heat of sun,  
And half averted cheek,—sheer trembling fires  
That maddened you!—and all things ever done  
To give your stormy blood its long desires.

Dear, beautiful, tempestuous, swift lover!  
My heart is breaking for your solitude  
Where only drowsy dreams and echoes hover,  
And where the very air's remotely hued.  
O surely God for you will make exception—  
Not burden you with strange, immaculate bliss,  
But give into your shadowy reception  
One clear-eyed angel whom you still can kiss!

## LINES

Dearest and Best! In that hour to be,  
Of the lifting mists and the changing sea—  
When the deep and sullen tide runs out,  
And the blue waves leap, and the wind's about—  
When the sun in Heaven shines broad and clear  
Through the vast gale whistling: "You are  
near"—

When the strong gulls swoop with an eerie cry  
To the deep below from the deep on high—  
Will my heart on that day lie cold and numb,  
Throbbing and whispering: "You have come?"

No sound will it make on that distant day  
Of the wind's high shout and the sea's glad play—  
No fragrance or color, and no rite  
Will flower from its fierce delight;  
But like a splendidly falling star  
Will it rush, will it blaze, to the place where you  
are—

Like a wrecked thing living still, and cast  
Back in the arms of the thundering blast—  
Like the leap of a soul just freed from pain,  
Like a terrible birth, will it struggle and strain—  
Like a tortured leaf that the wild winds shake  
Will it hear you, fear you, tremble, and break.

## TO A STATUE OF DIANA

Dost thou still hope, O being warm and fine!  
To burst the milk-white stone that hems thee in?  
Though fixed in austere marble, dost thou pine  
Once more to cast the form of night, and thin  
The odorous shadows with thy pearly flame—  
To press thy white foot to the mossy crest  
Of Latmos (where Endymion's still a name!)  
And warm the sheep wold to thy polished breast?

Yea, thou dost so—I think the perfect fold  
Of thy two lips just stirred a little then—  
As if to break their full and flawless mould  
And sigh thy sorrow to the hearts of men.  
I know that thy young limbs, though meetly  
locked  
In film of sheerest marble, ache to roam  
Again where once an ocean roared and rocked,  
And sought to reach thee with her dizzy foam.

Content thee, Spirit with the flame of Greece  
Still burning in thine inapparent blood!  
Lovers once watched for thy cold white increase,  
In salty ripples, on the thundering flood  
Of seas that brightly did thy least behest;  
And clouds of lambent fleece—made so by thee—  
Once danced before thee, thy handmaids con-  
fessed.  
These things are past, but thou—hast memory!

## INSPIRATION

Love, look at me—  
And make the future cool  
For agony  
Incarnate in a pool.

Or speak one word—  
It shall go forth as sound  
Of leaf and bird,  
And wind along the ground.

And give your touch,  
That I may weep again  
Who have wept much—  
My tears blown down in rain.

O take my kiss  
Upon you—let me pass  
From pain like this  
To grow again in grass!

## PREDESTINED

For when I first beheld your face, it seemed  
That that rapt moment had been fore-ordained  
While yet the world in drowsing ether swung,  
The radiant sun ungarnered riches, and  
The waters of the earth loose, intricate tone.  
O our two hearts have beat and burst ere this!  
Perhaps in marbled Corinth, till she oozed  
Beneath the rich-ribbed sands that sucked her sea,  
We breathed a mutual balm of night and love—  
Perhaps a willowy way in Sicily  
Wound through the morning meadows to the  
shore,  
And we two, radiant, followed. —Or on some  
Gray and gaunt battlement that crowned a coast  
Crested with fiery sunset, swept by the high,  
Eternal winds and moistures, we have stood,  
Fearful at our rejoicing. —O I've worn  
Uncounted selves away in beauteous thoughts  
Born to your trembling bosom, and have died  
A million deaths, renewing and recalling  
That lovelier, lonelier ecstasy, your voice!  
For I was born to hear it once, then cease,  
Stricken with sound too beautiful, and pass  
Into autumnal rains on yellow leaves  
Whose amber hearts with that same beauty  
ache—  
To lose my life in wind along the wastes,  
To find it out again, and strangely speak  
In sudden, soft-hued pipings from deep woods—  
And to grow still in quiet pools, and yield

Back beauty to the beauteous grasses there.  
And they who long hereafter sufferers be  
Shall pause at every note of my sweet sounds,  
And press their echoing hearts again and know  
That once my soul sang, having heard you speak.

## FRAGMENT

O there's an ancient woe in all this rain—  
Old trouble in the daylight's bitter end,  
Harsh memories that make the winds blow pain,  
And unhealed sorrow in the dews they rend.

## SPRING SONG

O may I ever see you so,  
In the early green and the early glow  
Of springtide morning—in your eyes  
Lush April's wet and wavering skies,  
And your young voice—O speak again!—  
The heaven of hillsides after rain,  
Piercing with sweet and stinging sound  
Blown buds begot in fruitful ground.  
O let me merge our love begun  
With wondering wildwood—make it one  
With sparkling mists and drenchéd meads—  
Where bluebells chime and bloodroot bleeds—  
And stamp your perilous smile on fields  
Of gathering bloom, and all that yields  
Innocent freshness gladly up—  
Hushed scent within a lily's cup,  
And mystic maidenhood of leaves  
Won by the wastrel wind who grieves  
For close-clipped hills of chilly sheen,  
And watery distances of green.

And in the age of after-years,  
When willows sigh, and purpling tears  
Start up in tremulous violets weak  
For lovely love that thrushes speak  
Amid the checkered warm and cool,  
And daffodils give to some pool  
Their pale perfections—then may I,  
In every rift of jocund sky

And stir of stem and spark of sun—  
In every birth by Spring begun—  
Feel pulsing in my sentient soul  
The recollection, vernal-whole,  
Of this our morning—hear you speak  
In winds along the earth's green cheek,  
And sense the halo of your hands  
Round roots and rushes, and by sands  
That gently hold the troubled streams  
Renew your clasp—and in sunbeams  
On beauteous mosses throbbing, rest  
My unsung songs upon your breast.

## PETITION

Great, pitying God! Will even You not purge  
Me clear of excess beauty? The cool pain  
Of wet-eyed spring is on me once again,  
And all the swift and scarlet autumn urge.  
Your stars have drained me pallid, and the note  
That swarmed up lately in some blackbird's throat  
Is sounding still; and in my blood there flows  
The current crimson of an endless rose.

O draw the hush of evening out of me,  
And never let the slowly darkening breast  
Of some lone, lovely hill keep me from rest  
Again. —But set the bird within me free!  
And let my mind's sun sink and richly break—  
Take every moist, intoxicating ache  
That was a flawless flower—and from my brain  
Uproot the deep woods dripping quiet rain.

## REINCARNATE

You are that beauty—are that flowering dawn  
And deep, sweet-lidded musing, and remote,  
Unfathomed leafiness—all wan  
For sight of yours does Paris' face still float  
Round perished Troy; and Perithous is bound  
In mute, perpetual penance underground  
For your heard voice—and young Icarus slips  
To death, his wisdom melted on your lips.

O perilous breath of deep-sea beauty born  
To fearful Cypress! O clear-chiseled calm  
Of that still lovelier loveliness, forlorn  
In Attic twilights! All the intricate balm  
That swayed insensate Psyche had your breath,  
And drowned Leander's undulating death  
Was wrought for your young breast—and for  
your touch  
Pygmalion loved his marble too, too much!

## A POEM

One wink from a tremulous star,  
One drop on a flower;  
From a glory of music, one bar,  
From a lifetime, one hour.

A crystal-sharp shaft from the moon,  
A mist just begun;  
A stir in the pines as they swoon  
To the heart of the sun.

• • • • •

And from you, who would dare, who would sing—  
Everything!

## SAMSON TO DELILAH

But strange and stern, how I,  
Who, from the womb that bore  
Me in my strength—ay, more  
Than that, than my first cry  
Of lusty living, and  
The sinews of my hand  
Just shaping—before they  
Took form of breathing clay,  
Before my growing brain  
Was more than gradual pain  
To her that bare  
The heavy share  
Of my oncoming;  
And while this blood impassioned  
Lay sluggish and unfashioned,  
Although foretold  
By seers of old,  
And with the thrumming  
Of reed and mystic lyre,  
By scripture and by crier—  
I, who was called The Strong  
In prophecy and song,  
By men of holy sight  
Predicted full of might—  
Who, great with restless brawn,  
Untrammeled and unshorn,  
Was destined but to say:  
“I come—give heed—make way!”  
Was destined but to preach:  
“That which I want, I reach

With these restless hands,  
Be it your men or lands,  
Your women or your mart—  
So that it draws my heart!—  
While this one stares and quakes,  
Lo, Samson sees—and takes.”  
Strange, then, how I, all these  
Possessed of, at mine ease  
And unconstrained, have grown  
At once so meek; have thrown  
Mine heritage to dust,  
My dazzling birthright thrust  
Away—my power cast  
To the receding past.

Give me thy hand here, Love,  
For evening closes down  
Around us and above—  
Again that sigh, that frown,  
And thou art wearied, while  
My heart burns on!—But smile  
Down at me once—ah, so  
Thou didst smile long ago—  
Or was it lately? I  
Know not—thy smile, my cry,  
Seem faint and far  
As yonder star  
Above us reigning;  
Even thy listless hands  
And brightly-braided strands  
Of perfumed hair  
Are phantoms where

My soul lies straining.  
For in this cedared vale  
Realities turn pale,  
And while yon bright bird sings,  
The awful pomp of kings  
Grows dim; these vivid flowers  
And swift, consuming hours  
Have altered all, and made  
From vital things a shade;  
Here life's a ghost, and mind  
A thing grown dumb and blind;  
The world's a wraith, and thought  
A dear delusion; naught  
Is now, that was—again  
Thou sigh'st—is thy gain  
So little, then? Is all  
This surging strength in thrall  
For thee such meagre thing?  
Ah, well!—But let me bring  
A little of the fear  
And exaltation here  
And speak it out to thee—  
Belovéd, bear with me  
Awhile; all this took place  
That day I saw thy face,  
And my heart's struggling ache  
Must ease itself, or break.

Delilah, dost thou know—  
As I know, well, so well!—  
What day it was? The snow  
Of Sorek's blossoms fell

About thee as thou gazed  
Seaward, and, all amazed,  
I watched thee. O, the start!  
The furious pulse, the heart  
That strangled, wavered, rushed,  
The blood's rebound that crushed  
The startled tongue  
All mute; and wrung  
The rooted flower  
Of this rebellious soul,  
At once made perfect, whole,  
Conceived complete,  
Reborn to meet  
That throbbing hour—  
Then that swift, piercing pain  
Through flesh, through soul and brain,  
And through the lurid light  
Those far sails, mystic, white—  
Above, the brooding skies,  
And close, thy watchful eyes;  
Beyond, the shrouded ships,  
And near, thy wondering lips—  
O my unbounded pride  
In that one moment died,  
And all my vaunted ease  
Passed from me on the breeze  
That sang about thy hair.  
O Love! O Wonder! There,  
In that wild golden light,  
On that sea-smitten height,  
The strong wind came and tore  
My soul full out, and bore

Him struggling to thy feet—  
For thee to laugh at, Sweet!—  
The savage sunset shook  
My groping brain, and took  
This pulse, this life, this me,  
And gave it up to thee.

## DESPAIR

What is a poem that's made for you,  
Intricate, infinite Loveliness?  
A frost on the grasses, a cloud in the blue,  
And the moon gone mad for her own caress.

What is a love, a life, a heart,  
Tortured into your minstrelsy?  
A glory, a yearning, a swoon and a start,  
And—God in Heaven!—a memory.

## NOCTURNE

When the winds of Heaven are sighing,  
And the dews of God come down—  
When the night's still face is lying  
On the beating heart of the ground—  
When the first star shines,  
And the pitying pines  
The dusk in their arms have wound,

When a mist like love's beginning  
Is gathering in to press  
Earth's cheek—when the day is winning  
A lingering last caress  
From the trembling lips  
Of the foliage tips  
That silence with music bless—

O Love! In that hour of yearning,  
In the twilight's unended desire,  
My spirit to yours is returning,  
Like music blown back to its lyre—  
Like the heart to its ache,  
And the swan to his lake,  
And the sun to his sources of fire!

## TO JOHN KEATS

Where is thy voice, thy brain with beauty laden,  
Where now thy leafy pilgrimage of song?  
Thy vale, thy hill, thy tremulous youth and  
malden,  
Thy luscious walks, thy rich, reluctant gong  
Mellow on midnight? Where thy heapéd sweets  
Sugared with pyramids of musk and thyme,  
Thy freshest blossoms woven into rhyme  
Round carven cups, or wreathing fragrant meats  
And spongy delicates? The warm lights glowing  
Through frosty quietude, and wet winds flowing  
On latticed love? Blue incense spicy-curling,  
Veined flesh and ruddy lip, and jewelled purling  
Of gentle streams round moss and marigold,  
And bosky beauties that high noontimes hold?

. . . . .

In Rome there is a grave . . . But here, last night,  
The chill and mellow calm—the evening light—  
Cool-couched on leaves along the hill's deep brow,  
Wafted the martyred music that was thou.

## IMPOSSIBLE

Dear Heart, if it were possible, were mine,  
To write you something perfect! If I might  
Melt deep into the infinite, sharp shine  
Of winter sunset—gather frigid light  
To pour around a song you'd love, and frost,  
And crackling, bitter quietude, and blue  
Austerity—and carry all to you,  
With shivering shades by brittle branches tossed.

Of if, some day when April's laughing, I  
Might phrase forsythia, rhyme a rustling wood  
With spiked, sweet hyacinths, and luscious sigh  
Of rich anemones! O if I could  
Discharge the springtime laughter from one star  
Into one line—ere little birds disperse  
Collect from them some feathery, sweet verse,  
Then take the thing I'd made to where you are!

## MATUTINAL

This early morning in the soft, chill air  
Your touch was on me, beautiful and bleak.  
The motionless gray tree tops held your hair,  
The coldly flushing span of sky, your cheek—  
And in the quietude I heard you speak.

## DEATH

. . . this best of all:  
There'll be no echo in myself, no call  
Toward stainless rush of springtide winds, and  
                singing  
Of rooted meadow bloom, and sibilant swinging  
Of soft-spun fragrance. O, there'll be an end  
To ruthless beauty! Some law will suspend  
The mortal agony of opening flowers,  
And the intolerable autumn hours  
Wild-blowing in my blood. The silent grief  
In coldly shadowed snow will find relief,  
And from my tortured pulses the rich bee  
Will extricate his drowsing, gradually.  
And never more will trees make savage swaying,  
And never more the sun a pitiless praying,  
Against my heart; nor will the darkening pain  
On little twilit lakes be mine again,  
Nor some bird's voice. But there'll be infinite  
                sleep,  
Quiet will re-absorb me, deep on deep,—  
Eternally—the unsolved tides will cease,  
And all the unread stars be washed in peace.

## LINES

My dear one! Shall you look at me again—  
Before we pass away from love and living—  
As once you looked? The April light would wane,  
The April darkness wax, as in the giving  
Of that one look, at that one time—O Love!  
Then deeply yearned desirous winds above  
The unfolding breaths, and bosoms dewy white,  
Of flowers that only yield their sweets to Night,  
In pity for his sighing—we were stilled  
By deep foretaste of agony, and thrilled  
With prophecy of splendor.—Heart of mine!  
All life was breaking forth in stars—but we  
Knew only that the earth with dews like wine  
Was drenched—that every bird had sung his  
song—  
That Spring lay in the breast of every tree—  
And that the trembling night had waited long.



# THE PLAYGROUND OF THE GODS



## ENDYMION

In a deep blue night, on Latmos' height,  
Endymion soundly slept;  
The sheep drowsed still on the frosted hill,  
The streams cold bubbles wept;  
And a shining breeze stirred the dreaming trees,  
And the stars their sparkle kept.

But the moon looked down, saw the beauteous  
brown  
Of the shepherd, and she shook  
With the unseen flame of an unknown name;  
And the winds her wisdom took,  
While she poured her soul in an aureole  
Around his lonely nook.

Endymion's eyes in thick surprise  
Half opened. He had grieved  
So deep and so much for her perfect touch,  
Had been so long bereaved—  
Then he found her lips, and the silver tips  
Of her fingers—and believed.

O never again, immune to pain,  
Will the moon curve chilly by,  
And never more will her beauty pour  
Its pallor without a sigh,  
Nor her frigid laughter echo after  
Young lovers who cannot die!

For her crystal soul is bitter-whole  
With an ache she never guessed;  
And all her days she will backward gaze  
At the dream of herself caressed—  
At her heavenly light rocked soft and bright  
On the beat of a human breast.

## PSYCHE IN CUPID'S PALACE

Astonished Psyche gazing at her halls  
Of pure proportion—at an opal floor  
Where milky fires smoulder—at wrought walls  
With lustrous, shaded tapestries hung o'er—  
Beyond the perforate pillars, tartly glowing  
With chiseled amethyst and gemmy green,  
A darkening, disconsolate water, showing  
Cool restlessness—the luminous, sweet sheen  
On glades, just visible, where bees are winging  
And where cold lilies shun the eager dew—  
Where jocund bluebells make continuous ringing,  
And where the marigold conceives her hue—  
Young Psyche looking on at all of this,  
And none but casual winds with whom to share  
The secret of her whole bewildered bliss—  
The mystic hands entangling her hair,  
The unseen lips articulate above  
Her quickening heart in darkness, the strange  
face  
Against her bosom, motionless with love,  
The plumpy wings, and all the rustling grace  
She has but guessed at in the dead of night—  
Eternal passion in eternal flight!—  
Young Psyche wondering so—O, there's a theme  
A poet would give his melodies to dream!



## PROSERPINE

Into the blue, immaculate spring day  
Ran Proserpine, and flung her down beside  
Rich, fibrous moss. In endless love with play,  
And perfect violets, and grasses pied,  
She passed her cool-tipped fingers out and in  
Of bedded, wind-blown tangles, and the sweet  
Hepaticas fast wooed her to begin  
A gentle crushing of them with her feet.

All day she pulled young lilies frigid frail,  
And passionate anemones who feared  
So deeply she would pass them they grew pale—  
Once plucked—with memory of it. Trees endeared  
Themselves to her, for they would flicker soft  
Above the moistened rootlets of her hair,  
And murmur in her glowing ear, and oft  
Grow still because they found her face so fair.

And when at last deep evening freshly blew  
Her mellow stars before her, and came down  
Upon the listening vale, Proserpine knew  
That she should go, but lingered still. A crown  
Of waxy petals on her tired head  
Dropped sweetness, and the splendid, spangled  
hush  
Of yearning night crept round her breast, and bred  
Long thoughts that made her weary beauty flush.

And then a barbarous roar, and frightful Dis  
Loomed endlessly before her. Loud she screamed,  
But there was none to hear. He had his kiss,  
While from her startled arms the flowers streamed  
In fragrant fearsomeness.—And Proserpine  
Went sadly down to live among the shades,  
Where no deep-rooted blossoms nod and shine,  
And where there are no juicy, green, grass blades.

. . . . .

But once each year she breaks captivity,  
And blows in loveliness from sea to sea!

## THE CYCLOPS

When Polyphemus agonized for all  
That perfect Galatea was, he took  
His monstrous self where only the sad call  
Of eerie gulls could find him. One wild look—  
O great, gaunt, single eye!—he cast about  
The huddling flock, who looked amazed to see  
The windy, greenless home he'd found them out,  
Then—all his tawny bulk in agony  
Down-crouched upon a spiny cliff that reaches  
To the resounding surf from sounding beaches  
Of marshy bloom and stagnant, oozy reeds—  
He groped for his coarse implement of song—  
Of fibrous pipes compact—and breathed his needs  
Into the thorny vessel. All along  
The thunderous shore, poor Cyclops, ran the  
smile  
Of her finned playmates whom you dared to love,  
And unplumbed deeps of ocean, in the while  
That your preposterous passion breathed above  
Their sea-green secrets, brighter grew with mirth  
At your mad musing. Play on, Cyclops! Birth  
By Nereus begot, and soon to be  
Melted from marvellous marble to set free  
The tides of skilled Pygmalion's lone desire  
Was never wrought for you—but higher, higher  
Pitch your rough strain! And though she'll never  
love you,  
And though the infinite wash of air above you  
Is all of her soul's quiet that you'll know,  
And vapor all her bosom—still, still go

On playing broken melodies—they'll say,  
In some fair time beyond our little day,  
As lovely things as perfect meters do—  
The heart that made them being broken, too.

## NARCISSUS

Narcissus laughed when Echo loved him so.  
O vain Narcissus, what you threw away!  
An energy of violets mad to grow,  
A lovely shade to merge in lovelier day.

This Echo whom you wasted would have given  
Her bosky breath to have you find her fair—  
You could have had deep foreknowledge of  
Heaven  
Within the whispering wildwood of her hair.

And all her playfellows—sound, scent and hue,  
White-rooted stalks and ripe, reluctant leaves  
That fold at night—she would have given you,  
And every birch that laughs, and fir that grieves.

Instead, you blow—as lovely as your name,  
I'll grant,—in solitude. Her voice  
Grown simple sport for mortals, wan and tame,  
Is all of her that's left you—what a choice!

## DAPHNE DELIVERED

Light-hearted Daphne, glowing from her day  
Of breathless sojourning in April wood,  
Came to a meadow where there laughed and lay  
A glistening pool. So cool it looked, she could  
Scarce wait to loose her humid tunic, and  
Kneel down to scoop up bubbles with each hand.

Her fervent face—a warm, delicious rose  
Fresh-tinctured with still drops—gazed back at  
her  
From crisply curling crystal; her white pose  
Melted deep-tinkling, and began to purr  
Across sharp pebbles; and all round about  
Old moss, her loveliness ran in and out.

Apollo came imperiously that way,  
His fair, cruel nostrils dilated with green  
And spicy odors of the sprightly day,  
His stormy pulses echoing the sheen  
On waters, vales and mountains, his bright feet  
Turning the spongy ground beneath them sweet.

He balanced tiptoe on the juicy mead,  
Exulting in her apprehensive head;  
She looked star-eyed upon him; her heart, freed  
From its first tingling panic, dyed her red.  
And then she turned and fled into the mist—  
A sweet no god of beauty could resist.

Each anguished poplar and compassionate oak  
Flung out a darkening arm to lend her aid,  
And young spring beauties whom their own tears  
choke

Yielded whatever luscious little shade  
Was theirs to give; and violets half asleep  
Woke richly up to whisper and to weep.

In spite of all they did, Apollo gained.  
His ardent breath smoked in her wild, wet hair  
Before, of every energy deep-drained,  
She sent to watchful Artemis her prayer:  
“O goddess of clear chastity! O free  
And frigid priestess! Minister to me!”

The god behind her smiled. One zealous hand  
Had almost snared her drooping, burning cheek  
When all the feverish air grew slowly grand,  
And chilly silver tinged east distant peak—  
And Daphne whisperingly began to be  
A clearly-tipped, ambrosial laurel tree.

Her limbs took on a tough and fibrous skin,  
With dancing leaves her perfect hair grew loud,  
And balmy bark hemmed pitifully in  
Her grateful bosom. Then a mellow cloud  
Of tree top folded in her young, young breath,  
And lulled it to a greenly rustling death.

Apollo moved away with somber pace,  
And every tree he passed held up one face.











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